



Whitman, Walt. Vlati trave [review]

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tempt to accommodate his work to theoretical trends—despite the smooth writing and seamless organization of the book—only weakens what would have been an impressive scholarly performance by traditional standards.

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WALT WHITMAN. *Vlati trave [Leaves of Grass] / Respondez!*, ed. and trans. Hamdija Demirović. Sarajevo: Svjetlost [State publishing house], 1988. 189 pp.

This volume—with poems, prose writings, and criticism translated into Cerbo-Croatian—approaches Whitman's career from several angles. Demirović introduces his expert translation of some sixty poems from *Leaves of Grass* with an essay, "The Poet of Love of Life" (5–15), which traces Whitman's influence on William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, and other poets. His discussion of Whitman's career is handled well, but elsewhere Demirović tries to cover too much ground in so short an essay on Whitman's influence. Often he is elliptical. One would like to hear more about Whitman and these authors.

The supporting apparatus is comprehensive. A brief selection of Whitman's prose writings, "Walt Whitman Speaking" (173–175), includes one of his anonymous reviews of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. This is followed by a selection of excerpts, "Critics on Whitman" (176–182), and includes the text of Emerson's letter to Whitman on the first edition, with additional commentary by Algernon Swinburne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, John Jay Chapman, George Santayana, Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Amy Lowell, F. O. Matthiessen, and Randall Jarrell. A final section, "Whitman in Our Country" (183–185), offers brief commentaries on Whitman's career by Nobel laureate Ivo Andrić, Antun Branko Šimić, and Moroslav Krleža. There is also a suggestive concluding note by Mirodrag Pavlović on Whitman's "apocalyptic vision" in "Respondez!" (184–185), a poem that Whitman dropped from the final 1881 edition.

Selections are given from such long poems as "Song of Myself," "Starting from Paumanok," "I Sing the Body Electric," "The Sleepers" (two lines), and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." However, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" is given complete, as are such poems as "This Compost," "To a Common Prostitute," "Miracles," and "A Noiseless Patient Spider." Peculiarly, Demirović does not include even a sampling of "Passage to India." Otherwise he draws on the full range of Whitman's poetry from 1855 to 1881, and he concludes with several selections from the 1891 *Annex Good-Bye My Fancy*. Such important clusters as *Children of Adam*, *Calamus*, and *Drum-Taps* are well represented. Demirović's notes to the poems are knowledgeable and concise.

This is an attractive volume, bound in pressed white boards, with a reproduction of a Salvador Dali painting on the front cover: a black child on a beach, gazing upward. This volume is also a testimony to the quality of secondary

school education in the Republic of Bosnia and Hercegovina, Yugoslavia, where it is "included in the reading list for secondary school pupils" in an edition of 5000 copies.*

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*In this connection, an earlier translation of selections from *Leaves of Grass* into Slovene, *Travne bilke*, mainly by Peter Levec (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1962), was also "intended primarily for secondary schools." Another translation of *Leaves* into Slovene is being prepared by Dr. Uroš Muzetić of Ljubljana. All translations into English for this review were provided by Marija Bolta.

WALT WHITMAN. *Foglie d'Erba*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli, and an introduction by Giorgio Manganelli. Translation by Ariodante Marianni. Milan: Rizzoli Libri, 1988, 507 pp.

This bilingual edition of a judicious selection from *Leaves of Grass* will probably supplant Enzo Giachino's complete translation which first appeared in 1950 and was reprinted in 1965. The present translation by Ariodante Marianni, an experienced translator of W.B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas, is more vigorous, more expressive and more nervous than Giachino's. It is superior, too, to Franco de Poli's short bilingual selection published in 1967, which completely ignored "Song of Myself" and thus gave a badly truncated and lop-sided image of *Leaves of Grass*. Biancamaria Tedeschini Lalli, on the contrary, has included all the major poems except for "Passage to India," "The Sleepers," and "To Think of Time." But these regrettable omissions were unavoidable, since she had to make a selection. Her notes on the poems at the end of the book and the footnotes are precise and well documented, and she has had the good idea of adding to her introduction her translations of six poems on Whitman by Ezra Pound, Jorge Luis Borges, Rubén Darío, Pedro Mir, Pablo Neruda and Allen Ginsberg.

Walt Whitman has been well served by his Italian translators, but this is not surprising, for, generally speaking, the Italians are excellent translators of poetry. Julien Green, the American novelist (who writes in French) recently declared in an interview (*Magazine Littéraire*, June 1989, p. 100) that "the finest translations [of poetry] are in Italian. . . . [Some] are also masterpieces in this language."

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